

Outreach

Fall 2003

Governor McGreevey Strengthens Law to Combat Housing Discrimination



In yet another example of his commitment to strengthening anti-discrimination laws and keeping New Jersey in the forefront of civil rights protections for its residents, Governor James E. McGreevey signed into law Senate No. 2454, which amends the Law Against Discrimination (LAD) to comport with the tougher federal fair housing statutes.

In doing so, the Governor strengthened provisions in the LAD designed to combat housing discrimination.

Specifically, the Governor's action on September 12, 2003 positions the Division to seek to re-establish a critically important work-sharing agreement with the federal Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD). The work-sharing agreement would make federal funds available to New Jersey for the reimbursement of housing investigations that the Division is already required to perform.

It has been 13 years since the State ended its work-sharing agreement with HUD as a result of amendments to the federal Fair Housing Act not contained in the state's LAD. Without a contractual agreement and HUD certification to conduct investigations, the Division's docket of housing cases has steadily declined over the years, to the point where less than five percent of the agency's cases pertain to housing. Yet, the problem of housing discrimination has not gone away.

The absence of a work-sharing agreement with HUD has also minimized the Division's ability to adequately enforce fair housing laws and work with housing advocates in the state. A strong relationship among fair housing organizations and advocacy groups is key to the Division's ability to generate case referrals and keep abreast of significant housing discrimination issues.

However, thanks to the collective efforts of Governor McGreevey, Attorney General Peter C. Harvey and members of the State Legislature, the State is reclaiming its reputation as a leader in protecting people from unlawful housing discrimination. The introduction of S-2454/Assembly Bill A-3774, which was passed unanimously by the State Legislature, comes nearly one year after Governor McGreevey strengthened the LAD by signing into law an amendment that prohibits housing discrimination by landlords on the basis of a tenant's lawful source of income or rental subsidy, such as a HUD Section 8 voucher.

In anticipation of renewal of its relationship with HUD, the Division is moving forward with the creation of the Housing/MDRR (Multiple-Dwelling Reporting Rule) Special Investigations Unit.

This new unit, which is managed by Elizabeth Russian and staffed by specially-trained

housing investigators and attorneys, is implementing large-scale, aggressive initiatives involving housing testers and the coordination of efforts with non-profit housing advocates. This way the Division will be able to more effectively identify and prosecute patterns and practices of housing discrimination that have gone unchecked due to a lack of technical and financial resources.

The unit also oversees compliance with the MDRR, which obligates landlords with 25 or more housing units to submit an annual report to the Division detailing the racial and ethnic composition of their housing applicants and leaseholders. The reports, which landlords can now download from the Division's Web site, assist the Division in discerning potential patterns of housing discrimination, and also provide information on the degree of access landlords provide to persons with disabilities.

For the 2003 reporting period, plans are underway to allow apartment complex owners to complete and submit their MDRR annual reports on-line. This new service will reduce the amount of paper work and data entry for both complex owners and the Division. An added benefit will be the enhanced data analysis available to the Division as a result of this on-line initiative.

In a first for the Division, MDRR annual report forms can now be downloaded from the Division's Web site: www.NJCivilRights.org. Apartment owners who fail to file timely reports may be subject to fines and penalties. ▼

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Why Civil Rights Enforcement Is a Top Priority

by Attorney General Peter C. Harvey



Attorney General
Peter C. Harvey

Domestic security, corporate fraud, government corruption, gangs and domestic violence are among my top priorities.

Crimes involving document fraud have consequences for our national security and demand special attention.

At the same time, allegations of government corruption and corporate fraud are on the rise, and require careful investigation and aggressive prosecution.

As for our young people, I strongly believe we must intercede in their lives now with programs and initiatives designed to create safe and stable environments that can help them grow and mature into productive members of society. To that end, the Department of Law and Public Safety must coordinate its efforts with schools, police, faith-based organizations and the Courts to stop family violence, and to offer young people real alternatives to gangs and drugs.

Of equal importance, however, is my commitment to the strict enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and protecting the civil rights of New Jersey residents.

As someone who grew up in the South during the civil rights struggles of the 1960s, and who saw firsthand how the law can dramatically impact the lives of ordinary people, stopping discrimination is an equally high priority of my office.

Already this year, the Division on Civil Rights has filed nearly 800 complaints on behalf of New Jersey residents who claimed they were victims of discrimination in employment, housing and places of public accommodation. I am extremely proud of the Division's record and its efforts to reach out to the most vulnerable segments of our society to inform people of their rights, and of the laws we enforce.

I commend Director Frank J. Vespa-Papaleo, and the entire Division on Civil Rights staff for their renewed commitment to the work of the Division. They have focused not simply on education, but also on aggressive enforcement.

To highlight some of the Division's work, I offer the following summaries of three complaints involving discrimination in the workplace. On the job, as with everywhere else, people have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. When this basic right is threatened and the law is violated, the State — as evidenced by these cases — will prosecute those responsible.

Of the three cases, one has been closed and two are currently in mediation. All three, to be sure, serve as ample proof of the State's intent to preserve and protect the workplace as an environment where racism, harassment and intimidation will not be tolerated.

Catherine Greffe v. Hackettstown Auto Parts, et al.

In October, Director Vespa-Papaleo adopted an Administrative Law Judge's order and awarded \$20,000 to a woman who alleged that her employer created an abusive and hostile work environment based on sexual harassment.

The case is noteworthy in that the defendant, Robert Poyer, Jr., allegedly exercised total power and authority over the working environment in his capacity as storeowner and supervisor of Catherine Greffe, the complainant. In other words, there was no one in a position of authority to which Ms. Greffe could turn to stop the harassment.

Based on an investigation by the Division conducted in June 1999, Administrative Law Judge Maria Mancini LaFiandra ruled that Ms. Greffe was subject to "continual and unceasing" sexual harassment during her three years of employment with Hackettstown Auto Parts, Pro Automotive Warehouses and Hackettstown True Value Center. The defendant is the owner of all three stores.

The Judge found that Mr. Poyer routinely engaged in comments, gestures and conduct that were offensive and egregious in nature. Specifically, Mr. Poyer displayed sexually explicit materials in the female employees' working area, was verbally abusive to female workers, and on one occasion lost his temper and allegedly threw a carburetor across the room, nearly striking a female employee.

In addition to awarding \$20,000 to Ms. Greffe for emotional distress and humiliation,

Director Vespa-Papaleo imposed \$10,000 in civil penalties and ordered the defendant to cease and desist from any act prohibited by the Law Against Discrimination.

Irvin A. Thomas v. Café Neena & Bob Clark (owner)

Following an investigation by the Division on Civil Rights into allegations of racial harassment, hostile work environment and differential pay, the state charged the owner of a Gloucester County restaurant with unlawful discrimination on the basis of race.

The complaint alleged that for a period of 19 months, Bob Clark, owner of Café Neena in Woodbury, repeatedly used a racial epithet in the presence of employees when referring to Irvin A. Thomas, a dishwasher at the restaurant. Mr. Clark also allegedly used racist remarks to describe other black employees, challenged black employees to take him to the NAACP, and on at least one occasion threatened to wear his "white sheet."

According to the "Finding of Probable Cause" issued by the Division in August 2003, Mr. Thomas was subjected to "severe and pervasive harassment," and a work environment punctuated by hostility and offensive language leaving him "no alternative but to resign." There was, however, insufficient evidence to conclude that Mr. Thomas was differentially paid.

During the investigation, black and white employees of the restaurant were interviewed and supported Mr. Irvin's allegations. The investigation also determined that employees of the restaurant were afraid to discuss Mr. Irvin's treatment by Mr. Clark for fear of losing their jobs.

Mr. Clark has denied all of the allegations. The case is currently in mediation, a form of alternate dispute resolution in which the parties make a final attempt to resolve the complaint.

Kristyn Haemmerle v. S.T.A.R.S. Productions (Steve Tarkanish, President)

In July, the Division on Civil Rights issued a "Finding of Probable Cause" in the case of a woman who accused her former employer of creating a hostile work environment by subjecting her to sexually derogatory

From the Desk of the Director

The Division Observes Hispanic Heritage Month



J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo, Director

In recognition of “**National Hispanic Heritage Month**,” which was observed from September 15 through October 15, the Division on Civil Rights invited six New Jersey artists to showcase their work for an exhibition entitled: “*An Expression of Civil Rights Through New Jersey’s Hispanic Artists.*”

At a September 16 reception held at the Division’s Newark offices, more than 75 guests mingled with the artists while experiencing contemporary pieces of artwork ranging in styles from abstract to interpretative to representational. The exhibit remained on display throughout Hispanic Heritage Month at the Division’s Newark, Paterson and Trenton offices, as well as at Department of Consumer Affairs’ Newark office.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the artists who contributed their work and participated in our special tribute to Hispanic culture, achievement, heritage and pride: **Alicia**

Maury and Sandra Acker, both of Paterson; Nancy Saleme and Patricia Cazorla, both of Surf City; Henry Martinez of Bloomfield; and Jose Camacho of Montclair.

As a precursor to our observance of Hispanic Heritage Month, the Division’s newly assembled **Hispanic Advisory Committee** held its first meeting on Sep-

tember 4. Committee Chairwoman Zulima Ferrer, who serves as Regional Supervisor in the Division’s Paterson Office, urged committee members to focus their energies on identifying issues of concern in the Hispanic and Latino communities and developing recommendations on how to address those

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The Division’s Hispanic Advisory Committee held its first meeting on September 4, 2003. Attending were Jeff Maclin, Adriana Tovar, Aida Rawlins, Zulima Ferrer, Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo, Axel Miranda, Deputy to the Chief of Staff for Governor James E. McGreevey, Michael Ayles and Elbia Concepcion.

Civil Rights Enforcement

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tory remarks during her one-year employment as an administrative assistant.

The complainant in the case, Kristyn Haemmerle, alleged that Steve Tarkanish, president of S.T.A.R.S. Productions, an entertainment agency based in Newton, routinely made lewd and offensive remarks in her presence – remarks often directed specifically at her. Ms. Haemmerle further stated in the complaint that Mr. Tarkanish persisted in making disparaging comments despite making known her objections to both him and the agency’s office manager.

During a fact finding conference held by investigators in May 2003, several current and former employees of the company corroborated Ms. Haemmerle’s allegations of sexual harassment and stated Mr. Tarkanish frequently made comments to office staff that were sexual in nature.

Mr. Tarkanish has denied charges of discrimination, and the case is currently in mediation. As with all mediation efforts conducted by the Division, if the case cannot be resolved it will be investigated and may be referred to the New Jersey Office of Administrative Law where an Administrative Law Judge will hold a formal hearing or non-jury trial on the merits of the case.

In addition to these cases, the Division has brought a number of other actions challenging discriminatory treatment including:

- A complaint against the owners of the Highgate Apartments in Ewing, Mercer County, for allegedly telling prospective minority tenants that no housing units were available while inviting prospective renters who were white to view sample units and advising them that units were available.
- A complaint against Le Terrace swim club in Nutley, Essex County, for allegedly telling a member that non-white guests could not attend her child’s

birthday party at the club because Le Terrace was a “Europeans only” facility. That case has since been settled, with the settlement agreement requiring, among other things, that the club ownership pay for civil-rights-related public awareness initiatives.

- Complaints against realty companies in Atlantic and Essex counties, and apartment complexes in Hunterdon and Passaic counties, for allegedly refusing to rent or show housing units to applicants who intended to pay using federal rental assistance vouchers.

In conclusion, while these cases may highlight particularly egregious conduct by a few employers, housing owners, and those who operate places of public accommodation, we must continue to ensure that all persons are protected from unlawful harassment and discrimination. The Division on Civil Rights is here to help in that effort. I am here to help the Division advance this mission. ▼



Desk of the Director

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concerns. The committee is made up of Division staff and will meet on a quarterly basis over lunch and after work.

For its first meeting the committee was fortunate to have **Axel Miranda**, Deputy Chief of Staff to Governor James E. McGreevey, speak and brief the group on policy issues being examined by the Governor's Office. Mr. Miranda pledged to work with the committee and compared its mission to that of the **Governor's Hispanic Advisory Council**, which was created in April 2002 by Executive Order.

In its official capacity the Governor's Hispanic Advisory Council serves as the voice of the Latino community within the McGreevey Administration and works to ensure that the Hispanic/Latino community receives the benefits afforded to all New Jersey residents.

Governor McGreevey has made an unprecedented commitment to the Hispanic community through his appointments of Latinos to government positions and by supporting legislation and initiatives that reflect the diversity of the state and provide a better quality of life for all New Jerseyans. Albeit on a smaller scale, the Division's Hispanic Advisory Committee will try emulate the Governor's efforts as it reaches out to various segments of the state's Latino community.

Since the last issue of *Outreach* Division staff have been quite busy. The following is a brief summary of activities and developments around the agency:

Bureau of Enforcement: Two new enforcement units — the **Housing/MDRR Special Investigations Unit** and the **Disabilities/Public Accommodations Special Investigations Unit** — became operational in September. Both units have their own investigative staffs and will examine broad-based systemic discriminatory practices that affect a greater number of New Jersey residents. Additionally, several new investigators have been hired to work in the Division and recently completed training. I believe this new class of investigators is a very bright and committed group and will make an immediate impact.

Bureau of Policy: As noted in Attorney General Harvey's column, a Director's Order was issued in the matter of **Catherine Greffe v. Hackettstown Auto Parts, et al.**, in which the complainant proved she was subjected to severe and persuasive sexual harassment by the owner of the company, Robert Poyer.

Hispanic Heritage Month Art Exhibit Reception 2003



left Commissioner Olga Vasquez-Clough (far right) presents artists Henry Martinez, Patricia Cazorla, Nancy Saleme, Jose Camacho, Alicia Maury and Sandra Acker with plaques commemorating their participation in the Hispanic Heritage Month art exhibition sponsored by the Governor, Attorney General and Secretary of State.

right Keynote Speaker Isabel Nazario, Executive Director of the Office for Intercultural Initiatives, Director of the Center for Latino Arts and Culture at Rutgers University, New Brunswick

The original investigation of this case by the Division resulted in a "Finding of Probable Cause" that was successfully prosecuted by Deputy Attorney General **D'Andre Workman**. I want to commend DAG Workman, and Investigator **Sue Paletta** of the Paterson Regional Office, for their work and efforts on this case.

Bureau of Prevention and Community Relations: I am pleased to announce that the Division has created a joint initiative with the City of Camden and the Camden Board of Education under which approximately 4,300 Camden employees will receive training on the Law Against Discrimination and Sexual Harassment. Education staff with the Division's Bureau of Prevention and Community Relations will perform the training, which will be offered to administrators, managers, supervisors, police and fire department staff.

Training on bias-based bullying for Camden Board of Education teachers and staff will be provided by trainers with the **Division of Criminal Justice, Office of Bias Crime and Community Relations**.

On a final note, I want to acknowledge a member of our staff, **Waleska "Walli" Lucas**, a customer service representative in our Newark Regional Office. Ms. Lucas was the recent recipient of the Director's Recognition of Excellence Award (DRE). The DRE is given each quarter to outstanding employees who show dedication and commitment to teamwork, as well as exemplary service to our constituents throughout the state. Congratulations Walli! ▼

Division Promotes Training, Mediation and Enforcement Initiatives at Conferences and Community Forums Around the State

Over the last three months, Division on Civil Rights staff were either presenters or exhibitors at seven conferences around the state. According to Division Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo, the conferences offer the Division an opportunity to aggressively promote its training, mediation and enforcement initiatives to



With Newark Office, Division of Elections Director Doesn't Miss a Beat



Ramon de la Cruz

When the Director of the Division of Elections, Ramon de la Cruz, needed office space in Newark he turned to his colleague and fellow attorney, Division on Civil Rights Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo.

"Frank and I were sworn-in on the same day, so we know each other. When I put the word out I was searching for office space in Newark, he responded right away," said de la Cruz, whose agency comes under the New Jersey Department of Law & Public Safety and assists county election officials and the general public on matters of election administration.

A couple times a week Director de la Cruz tries to work out of the Division on Civil Rights' Newark office located at 31 Clinton Street.

"It's important for me to have some visibility here in one of the state's largest counties. Here I have conference space to hold meetings, and I'm in close proximity to many of the urban centers where I meet with election officials. It's a very efficient arrange-

ment. I don't miss a beat," said de la Cruz.

The Office of the Attorney General, the Division of Elections, and the Law Division are currently working with county and local election officials on the implementation of statewide election reforms mandated by the passage of the "Help America Vote Act of 2002" (HAVA). Under the federal legislation, New Jersey is scheduled to receive federal funds to enhance the electoral process, including replacing old mechanical voting machines, development of a centralized voting registration database and ensuring that polling places are fully-accessible to the disabled. The legislation calls for election reforms to be completed by January 2006.

Director de la Cruz said his Division is also working with the seven New Jersey counties that are required under the federal Voting Rights Act to provide bilingual election materials, sample ballots and other bilingual information at polling sites due to their large populations of Hispanic and/or Latino residents. The impacted counties include Bergen, Cumberland, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Passaic and Union.

"No election is perfect. But what the Florida 2000 election taught us was that money and technology does not guarantee a success-

ful election operation," said de la Cruz. "Rather, it's a process that involves collaboration with local and state election officials, and ultimately the voting public, to ensure that every eligible and qualified voter has an opportunity to cast a vote."

In addition to election reform, Director de la Cruz wants to make the Division of Elections more user-friendly. To that end he plans to introduce a series of new brochures in November 2003 that explain recent election reforms, as well as a brochure describing voter qualifications and disqualifications. He also said the Division is upgrading its Web site and reaching out to people with visual impairments and hearing loss to address their concerns with the electoral process.

"My overriding goal is to ensure that No. 1, all eligible voters are able to cast a vote, and that no qualified voter is disenfranchised inadvertently or through other means," said de la Cruz. "To accomplish that, you have to establish a dialogue with communities, election officials and advocates. Their feedback enables us to perform our job better.

"The Division of Elections is really a very small office with a huge responsibility. Whether it's language minorities, ethnic minorities, gender issues or the disabled community, my job is to reach out, identify concerns, and find out how we can collaborate with election officials to come up with resources and solutions," said de la Cruz. ▼

audiences and groups that can potentially generate referrals and educate the public.

"Enforcing state statutes that bar unlawful discrimination is our primary responsibility, and we take that very seriously. But we also recognize that the training we do for

employers and organizations on the Law Against Discrimination (LAD), and



At the Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey's annual convention on October 17, 2003, Daniel H. Jara, President of the Chamber joins the Division's representatives Hector Ayala and Zulima Ferrer.

sexual harassment, can potentially help reduce unlawful acts of discrimination and the need for costly litigation. For that reason we are trying to expand our role in training and education," said Vespa-Papaleo.

Beginning in January 2004, the Division will provide training on the LAD and sexual harassment to 1,300 employees of the City of Camden, and 3,000 employees of the Camden Board of Education. The Division's Bureau of Prevention and Community Relations will conduct the training. For information on training services please contact Phil Freeman, Assistant Director, Bureau of Prevention and Community Relations at: 609-292-2918, or visit our Web site: www.NJCivilRights.org

The Division participated in the following recent conferences and community forums: the New Jersey Human and Civil Rights Association Conference, Oceanport (Aug. 28); the Arab-American Civic Association's Memorial Celebration, Paterson (Sept. 12); the "Gurdwara - A Gateway to the Enlightener"

Forum, Bridgewater (Sept. 12); Governor James E. McGreevey's Conference on Housing and Community Development, Atlantic City (Sept. 22-24); the NAACP State Conference in Edison (Sept. 26-28); the Association for Advancement of Asian-Americans' Symposium on Gandhi and Civil Rights, Trenton (Sept. 30); the NJ Black Issues Convention, Cherry Hill (Oct. 2-5); the Asian American Civil Rights Summit, Branchburg (Oct. 9); the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Mini-Conference, Atlantic City (Oct. 14-16); the Sikh Community Forum at Carteret High School, Carteret (Oct. 16); the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Convention, Newark (Oct. 17); the New Jersey School Boards Association Convention, Atlantic City (Oct. 22-24); the Muslim Shia Community Meeting, Delran (Nov. 2); and, the New Jersey Education Association Convention, Atlantic City (Nov. 6,7).

The Division will also be represented at the upcoming League of Municipalities Convention, November 18-22, in Atlantic City. ▼



Asian-American Leaders Attend Civil Rights Summit

In a first for the Department of Law & Public Safety, a number of leaders from the state's Asian-American communities accepted an invitation to meet and discuss discrimination as part of a workshop sponsored by the Division on Civil Rights and the Somerset County Cultural Diversity Coalition.

More than 45 leaders representing Sikhs, Hindus, Arabs, Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans and other Asian and Pacific-American groups attended the October 9 "Asian-American Civil Rights Summit," held at Raritan Valley Community College, Branchburg, NJ.

In response to statistics indicating discrimination complaints by Asian-Americans represent only one percent of all complaints filed with the Division on Civil Rights in 2002, several leaders attending the meeting acknowledged that Asians are often reluctant to complain about discrimination and bias.

"By virtue of their native cultures and upbringing, Asians are typically taught to be respectful and deferential toward authority figures," said Kun Y. Lee, a businessman and member of the New Jersey Commission on Civil Rights. "As a result, many Asians may not be aware that some actions by their employers, their landlords or owners of public establishments may be unlawful. Among those who may suspect that they are being treated unfairly, there may also be a fear that, by making a complaint, they will lose their jobs."

Describing the event as a "beginning" of a new dialogue on bias and discrimination within the Asian community, Attorney General Peter C. Harvey urged the assembled leaders to help with educating their communities on the law and the resources available to combat discrimination.

"There are Asian-American people in our state who on a daily basis are mistreated. And we know that there are people who pre-judged other people based on their race, age and religion," said Harvey. "But it's going to require a consistent, ongoing dialogue to change this. And it will require all of you going back to your respective communities and letting people know that it's okay to come forward if they feel they have been victimized. We may not vindicate you each and every time, but we will thoroughly investigate every case that comes before us because unlawful discrimination is something we take very seriously."

Other featured speakers included Marie Tomasso, District Director, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; Dr. Jerry Ryan, President of Raritan Valley Community College; Amardeep Singh, Esq. of the Sikh Coalition; J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo, Director of the Division on Civil Rights; and, State Assemblyman Upendra J. Chivukula.

Among the initiatives discussed at the meeting was publicizing Asian civil rights cases, making informational materials explaining the laws against discrimination available in various languages, holding additional workshops on filing discrimination and harassment complaints and working with community groups to ensure a level of comfort with filing complaints.

For his part, Assemblyman Chivukula urged leaders to work together, irrespective of culture and nationality, to help qualified Asians obtain positions in government and law enforcement.

"In each and every field, we need to have a presence," said Chivukula. "Whether you are a Sikh, Hindu, Arab or Pacific-American,

left Community leaders pictured with Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo at the Asian-American Summit 2003

we must make known to the larger society what the issues and concerns are in the Asian community."

Director Vespa-Papaleo, who credited Commissioner Lee with the idea of organizing the summit and workshop, envisions additional meetings with Asian-American groups and organizations.

"As the Attorney General stated, this is a beginning. The key to any successful public awareness campaign is communication. We now must work with the individuals and organizations to get the word out so we can combat cases of bias and discrimination," said Vespa-Papaleo. "In the last two years alone Governor McGreevey has signed legislation strengthening anti-discrimination laws and requiring all school districts to have policies in place to address bias-based bullying in and around our public schools. The Governor has also established the first-ever Asian Advisory Commission. In other words, the tools are in place, we now have to make people aware." ▼

Attorney Seminar January 29, 2004

Making And Defending A Case Of Discrimination: A Primer To Practicing Before the EEOC and DCR.

This is a joint EEOC and DCR event
January 29, 2004

NJ State Bar Association
NJ Law Center, 1 Constitution Square
New Brunswick, NJ.

To register call (609) 292-2918

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or visit us at www.NJCivilRights.org

Co-sponsored by:

- Hispanic Bar Association of NJ
- Asian and Pacific-American Lawyers Association of NJ
- Garden State Bar Association
- NJ State Bar Association
 - Labor and Employment Section
 - Individual Rights Section
 - Minorities in the Profession

PA and NY CLE credit may be offered from this seminar.

Long-time Member of Civil Rights Commission Says Fight Against Intolerance & Discrimination Never Stops

She is the Vice Chair of the New Jersey Commission on Civil Rights and the second-longest serving member, a retired human resources professional and a full-time wife, mother and grandmother.

And after more than 15 years on the Commission, Olga Vazquez-Clough says the struggle to preserve civil rights and bridge gaps between people of different backgrounds is still a passion.

"One thing we can never do is become complacent and feel the job is done. It's never done. Every year there are new challenges and every year

you have to reach out to another group, another layer of consciousness and new people who are coming into this country," said Vazquez-Clough. "I think we have come a long way since Martin Luther King, Jr., but there is still a great deal to be done. There are still people who are Neanderthals and think we need to go back in time. That's why I remain involved."

For her, education and outreach are key to keeping civil rights policies and enforcement relevant and meaningful.

"I firmly believe that most everyone is capable of abiding by the law, and doing the right thing

provided they have the right information. We could cut down tremendously on the amount of cases if everyone had access to information explaining the law and their rights," said Vazquez-Clough.

According to Vazquez-Clough, Division Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo is the right person for the job at the right time.

"The past three directors have all brought different perspectives and each has tried to make the Division better," said Vazquez-Clough. "Frank is very focused on raising the profile of the Division as a defender of civil rights, but he is also focused on educating the public, particularly employers, so they understand their obligations under the law. I am thrilled with his approach, and I really think we are on the brink of something exciting with the new Commission members and the opportunity to reach out to populations that were not represented before." ▼



right When the Commission on Civil Rights met in Atlantic City on Sept 9, they were joined by ranking members of Teamster Local 331. Pictured from left to right are: Assistant Director Gary LoCassio, Director J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo, Clarence "Bubby" Walker, Business Agent; Susan Taylor, Recording Secretary, Peter Marks, General Counsel, Chairman Felton Lingo, Joseph Yeoman, President of Local 331, Commissioners Sherine El-Abd, Dr. Joan Rivitz, Kun Y. Lee and John Crowell Campbell, Ricky Cistrunk, Business Agent and Pleasantville Councilman.



Want to Learn More?

Private Training is Available

The Division on Civil Rights offers Private Training on how to avoid and deal with discrimination.

Call the Bureau of Prevention and Community Outreach at:

609-292-2918

TTY: 609-292-1785

Register on the Web at:

www.NJCivilRights.org

State of New Jersey Office of The Attorney General

Department of Law & Public Safety

Division on Civil Rights

Outreach

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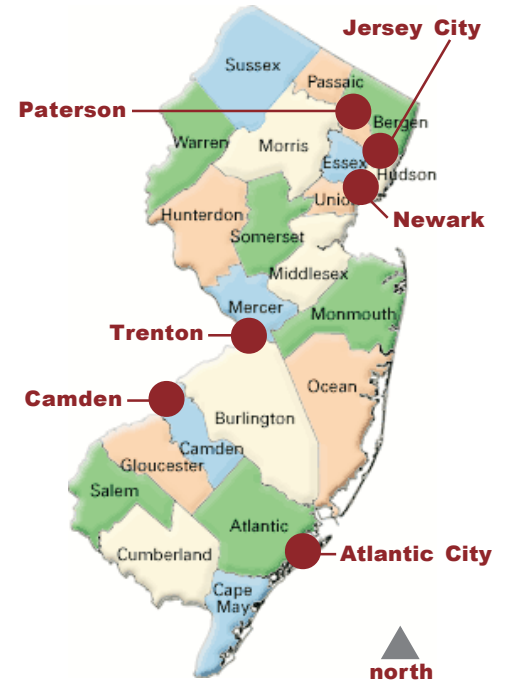
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